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Ready for the world stage

In early 2011, Universiti Utara Malaysia devised a strategic plan to consolidate our position and reputation as the leading university for management and business studies at the national level.

We are now moving towards the second phase (2016-2020) of our strategic plan, in which we intend to seize opportunities that may arise on the Asian and international stage.

One of the key markers used to guide us in this process is the global rankings criteria used by international ranking bodies.

Since the emergence of global rankings, there has been a heightened awareness among institutions of higher learning at both the national and international levels of the pursuit of prominence.

It is now imperative that universities measure their performance against ranking criteria.

The world university rankings are one of the primary sources of reference that influence prospective students and their parents on the choice of a study destination and the basis upon which the government determines funding allocations and develops higher education policies.

They affect university-industry partnerships, which are crucial to funding and shaping the even more direct and pragmatic contribution of academia to nation building.

Given the immense importance vested in world university rankings, we aim to gain a deeper understanding of ranking methodologies to improve our practices, consolidate our strengths and make substantial progress through the ranking system.

The Ministry of Education Malaysia recognises four world-ranking bodies: QS World University Rankings, Times Higher Education World University Rankings, Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU) and Webometrics Ranking of World Universities.

Currently, UUM is listed in the QS and Webometrics rankings. The results of the ranking exercise exemplify UUM's promising progress in both rankings.

In the QS ranking among Malaysian universities, UUM's position improved from 15th in 2012 to 9th last year. In the Asian ranking, we attained the 224th rank last year, a higher rank compared to our 299th

rank in 2012.

At present, based on the Webometrics ranking published in January this year,

UUM is ranked 1,652nd out of 22,000 participating universities.

This is a great improvement on the 2,214th position held last year.

We are also ranked 54th in the South-East Asia ranking, an encouraging jump from the 83rd position held in July last year. In Malaysia, we are ranked 8th, which is an improvement of four positions from that attained in July last year.

UUM has certainly taken huge strides in its progress since first joining the international ranking agenda barely a year ago.

However, we are aware that our efforts have to be doubled to realise our targeted position in the world rankings.

Towards this end, we are intensifying our focus on the current staples of academia, namely research and publication, teaching and learning, leadership, and innovation and commercialisation.

We aim to increase the quantity and quality of the research and publication activities undertaken by UUM academics. To encourage a rise in the number of UUM academics published in SCOPUS, ISI and other scholarly high impact publications, we have instituted a schedule of incentives to motivate authors.

In addition, we aim to fulfil the myriad of needs of our increasingly diverse population of staff and students by harnessing the properties of ICT in a campaign to place ourselves at the forefront of technological trends in education and enterprise.

We also plan to initiate a more comprehensive use of technology in education by way of e-learning powered by Web 2.0. We also intend to implement the use of Open Educational Resources (OER) to promote the sharing of teaching-learning materials among academics.

To position UUM as the hub of excellence in the region, we have begun our drive to raise the capacity of our schools and institutes at UUM to become Centres of Excellence (CoE) that specialise in their own core competencies.

We believe that such focus on our strengths will help us grow in stature and

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attract more private investments, making us a formidable force and a serious global contender.

We have never lost sight of our primary product – our human capital. We have always prided ourselves on nurturing well-rounded students.

We will also continue to focus on and maximise our capability to promote ethics and noble, humanitarian values among our students in an effort to mould resilient future leaders.

Our aim to raise our world ranking position will never be done at the expense of our self-esteem or the principles underpinning the vision and mission of the university.

Our efforts towards hoisting the UUM flag in the arena of Asia's Top 50 Universities go hand-in-hand with our efforts to transform ourselves into an internationally celebrated high performance Eminent Management University by 2020.

■ Prof Datuk Wira Dr Mohamed Mustafa Ishak is the vice-chancellor of Universiti Utara Malaysia.

